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SUBJECT: ISLAMIC CARD FAILS IN RECENT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

REF: A. SURABAYA 68
[1](#)B. JAKARTA 1157 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Vice President Kalla's attempt to play the Islamic card in Indonesia's recent presidential election campaign failed spectacularly. Despite blatantly playing up Muslim symbolism and his support from Muslim organizations, he only garnered 10-15 percent of the total vote. These results mesh with those of the recent parliamentary election in which support for Islamic-based parties dropped sharply in this, the world's largest Muslim country by population. Simply put, Kalla misread the political scene: at this point, Indonesians support a pragmatic form of politics focused on governance issues, making wedge issues less effective. END SUMMARY.

PLAYING THE ISLAMIC CARD

[1](#)2. (U) Per Ref B, President Yudhoyono massively won the July 8 presidential election. With official figures flowing in, Yudhoyono has taken over 61 percent of the vote, former president Megawati at 28 percent and, placing far back, VP Kalla has netted only about 10 percent.

[1](#)3. (C) On Kalla's part, this was not for lack of trying. During the campaign, Kalla heavily played the Islamic card, gaining endorsements from Muslim organizations and visiting Islamic boarding schools across this Muslim majority country. He played up that his wife and mother have links with Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, Nadhlatul Ulama (NU), while his father was a founding member of Indonesia's second largest organization, Muhammadiyah. Considered two of the largest Muslim organizations in the world, NU and Muhammadiyah have over 80 million members between them and both officially endorsed the Kalla-Wiranto team. Kalla leaned on these groups throughout the campaign as if trying to make it seem that he was "the 'only real Muslim candidate' in a race where all the candidates were in fact Muslim," one observer acidly remarked.

THE JILBAB WARS

[1](#)4. (C) In pressing Islam at every opportunity, Kalla played a divisive game. He and running mate Wiranto, for example, used the symbolism of the traditional Indonesian Muslim headscarf ("jilbab") to try to rally voters. His campaign team churned out giant posters on which his wife and Wiranto's wife appeared larger than the candidates themselves, demurely bedecked in modestly colored headscarves. The wives even led the media on a jilbab shopping spree and published a book called "Devout Wives of

Future Leaders." This marked the first time that the jilbab became a presidential campaign issue in Indonesia.

¶5. (C) Political operatives of the Kalla-Wiranto team even cast aspersions on the piety of President Yudhoyono's wife and running mate Boediono's wife. Kalla's team spread (somewhat obscurely themed) rumors that President Yudhoyono's wife Kristiani, who does not usually wear a headscarf, was a Christian because of her first name (she prefers to be called "Ibu Ani"). Meanwhile, Kalla-Wiranto campaign leaflets stated falsely that vice-presidential candidate Boediono's wife Herawati, who does not wear a headscarf either, was a Christian. In response, Ibu Ani and Herawati both donned headscarves publicly several times, but neither began wearing them daily.

¶6. (C) Some say that Kalla seized the opportunity to exploit religion as a campaign issue after President Yudhoyono decided not to choose a running mate from an Islamic-oriented party, choosing instead a secular, U.S. educated technocrat. After he nixed running with Kalla again, Yudhoyono, it was rumored, was considering a candidate from either the Islamic-leaning Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) or the National Mandate Party (PAN). There may have been an opening there, but it did not work for Kalla. His raw attempts to play the Islamic card not only failed to get out the voters in the large Muslim organizations (outside of some Islamic schools--see ref A), but failed to galvanize voters in his own fractured party, Golkar.

POLITICAL ISLAM -- NOT WHAT IT USED TO BE

¶7. (C) The failure of Kalla's effort meshes with the results

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of the April parliamentary election in which support for Islamic-based parties dropped sharply from a combined 38 percent in 2004 to 28 percent in 2009. Of the five best known Islamic parties, PKS is the only one to have increased its vote share, going from 1.36 in 1999 percent to 7.88 in ¶2009. (Note: PKS did so poorly in 1999 that it had to change its name and run as a different party in 2004.) The other four Islamic-based parties--PPP, PAN, PKB, and PBB--all saw their shares of the vote diminish, in some cases, sharply.

¶8. (C) In addition, these parties, while all Islamic in name, are far from presenting a unified front. They disagree on many issues from education to the implementation of Sharia law. Tensions within these parties have also marred attempts to cooperate. The 2009 elections clearly showed that neither the Islamic parties nor Islamic organizations can create voter support blocs that are viable without links to the secular parties.

THE POLITICS OF PRAGMATISM

¶9. (C) At this point--while still respectful of religion and its role in society--Indonesians support a pragmatic form of politics focused on governance issues. Yudhoyono benefited hugely from this in the election, with many Indonesians seeing him as a practical politician focused on reform and improving the economy.

¶10. (C) That said, Yudhoyono knows the importance of Islam in Indonesia: he makes it clear that he is a practicing Muslim and he has done the Hajj. He has also forged links to Islamic-based parties which have joined his coalition, such as PKS. In addition, he has bent over backwards at times to support issues of concern to the Muslim community, including regarding the Middle East or by supporting a controversial anti-pornography bill. Nonetheless, the President always underscores that he supports a secular Indonesia. In the meantime, the top three parties in Indonesia remain staunchly secular, while the Suharto-era pancasilist (nationalist, pluralist) doctrine seems to be more popular than ever. All

in all, given these factors, Kalla's flailing use of the Islamic card never stood a chance.

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